

Kyle left to get some sleep not long after our conversation, leaving me alone as I waited for M'gann to return. I was more or less done for the day, but I couldn't go to bed early because I wanted to meditate, but I promised M'gann I wouldn't do that until she was asleep to keep from freaking her out.

Thankfully I didn't have to wait too long, as she returned just an hour or so later, landing Bioship in the hangar and greeting me mentally.

*"Hey Warren!"* She thought to me, the moment she landed. *"I didn't expect you to still be up!"*

*"I want to meditate before bed, but I was waiting for you to come back first."* I explained, standing up from the couch and stretching.

*"Oh my gosh I am so sorry!"* She said, suddenly flying into the living room and landing in front of me. *"I was training and then we went on patrol and went out for dinner and got caught up in finding someone and-"*

I sent calming waves as she went on, finally reaching out and taking her hand. She stopped abruptly when I did that, blushing and looking up at me.

*"It's alright, no big deal."* I assured her. *"I mentioned it off hand once, its fine that it slipped your mind."*

*"Alright, I still feel bad though."* She said, looking down at our hands before looking back up at me.

*"How about you cook breakfast tomorrow so I can sleep in a little later?"* I suggested, mostly to help with her guilt.

*"Oh! Sure, I will!"* She said with a smile. *"Does that mean you're going to skip morning workout?"*

*"Probably. I will probably be up for another four or five hours."*

*"That long?"* She asked, now frowning. *"Warren, maybe you meditating when I'm sleeping isn't the best way to do this. I feel bad for forcing you to work with my schedule just because I can't handle a little quiet time."*

*"It's more than that and we both know it."* I responded, giving her hand a squeeze. *"I've been connected to you, remember? I can feel how much calmer you are now. There is nothing wrong with you needing to stay connected."*

The Martian let out a sigh, nodding her head in agreement. She casually leaned forward and put her head on my chest, the top of her head just under my chin. Well, it would have been casual if I hadn't felt her psyching herself up for it and then deliberately making herself slightly shorter to fit. I didn't say anything though, just wrapped an arm around her.

*"Thank you."* She finally said, her head still resting against me.

I sent her a wave of happiness and eagerness, a willingness to help her whenever she needed it. She pressed herself against me harder for a moment before pulling away.

*"I need to get ready for bed. And you need to get down to the grotto and get ready as well."* She said, a small smile on her lips. *"We can talk more tomorrow, okay?"*

*"Alright. Sleep well."*

She nodded and floated away, turning in the air and heading to the bedrooms. I watched after her for a minute, unable to keep the smile off of my face. After a full minute or two I finally shook myself and headed down to the grotto, sitting cross legged on my meditation platform. I could feel M'gann, her emotions happy and not a small bit excited, though she was noticeably calming herself.

After a few minutes I could feel her reach out for me, our minds settling in closer together. We didn't talk, just enjoyed the mental closeness for a while before I could start to feel her presence fading, pulling away before eventually I couldn't feel her anymore.

With a sigh I closed my eyes and focused on my breathing, on the pulsing energy within me. I settled into my meditation easily, feeling the world fade and shift as I opened my eyes, finding myself back in the now familiar training space.

"Welcome back Mopey! I hope you're ready for some hard work!"

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Despite her troubling exclamation the training started off relatively easy. I showed her how I had progressed, quickly running through the forms of basic earthbending before showing off what I had learned in fine control and endurance. After a few demonstrations she nodded.

"Alright Mopey, I think it's time for you to learn something a little more advanced." She said, stomping her foot and raising a small wall of stone. "This is the first step to a whole list of techniques. Stuff like Earthen Wave, Crater Landing, Sinking Tomb, even a few more. Now watch closely."

She turned back to the rock wall she had just created and pulled her fist back, punching the solid stone. Instead of cracking or moving, her fist simply sunk in, the stone almost seeming to flex as it absorbed the blow. It was an odd visual as she pulled her fist back, revealing an almost perfect fist sized hole.

“This is what your practice in fine control and endurance was for.” She explained before demonstrating again, this time instead of punching the wall she simply put her hand on it and pushed it in. The earth seemed to move around her hand, again flexing and moving like it wasn't a rigid material.

“It's about putting your energy through the stone, reaching out and enforcing your will into it. You want it to flex, to move and not crack. With the right mindset and force of will and chi it's possible to do things like this!”

She quickly spun around and sank into the earth, like she was falling through a liquid. I could feel the slight vibrations running through the ground before she popped up behind me.

“Or like this!”

This time she sank into the ground in the center of a small crater before shooting forward, the earth pushing up from under her feet and propelling her across the training area. She ran around me at a speed that I would have a hard time matching, despite the fact that her feet were moving no faster than a strange overly accentuated jog.

“Or even this!”

She transitioned her speed into a flying leap, landing with both feet on the ground, which sank downwards before a pillar of stone fired her into the air, twenty, thirty, forty feet up before she finally started to fall back down. When she finally got close to the ground it seemed to rise to meet her before sinking down with her, slowing her down, almost like it was catching her. The earth rose back up, leaving her standing there with a smirk.

“But before you can do any of that, you need to learn that.” She explained, gesturing to the stone wall. “So bring up your own wall, Mopey, time for you to practice.”

I spent the next two hours, slowly encroaching on my estimated time in this weird training simulation or whatever it was, working out how this new technique worked. I eventually got it down, managing to direct and sculpt the earth with my hands. It was a very different feeling from the simple projection of chi energy that I was doing before in my more simple earthbending, feeling much more like the projection and holding I had been doing in my endurance training. Eventually, when I had managed to get it down a few times in a row, Toph stopped me.

“Alright, you got a sense for it, now I want you to actually use it.”

She began the process of teaching me how to do an assisted leap, teaching me how to feel the energy pushing into the ground, forming a pillar and thrusting it into the sky. She had me start with small jumps, heights that I could probably get to on my own. After I managed to get that down she started teaching me the landing part, which proved a lot more difficult.

“You're reaching out to the earth as you fall.” Toph explained, currently bouncing up and down on the same spot, up about fifteen feet before falling back down, shouting advice at me the whole time. “Pull it up to meet you and back down to cushion your fall. It's never going to be as soft as a pillow but once you master it you can fall from a hundred or so feet up without a problem.”

I nodded, trying my best to focus on what I was doing while simultaneously listening to my teacher. I first sank myself lower and shot myself up, stopping about ten feet up in the air before falling back down. At that height I wasn't really in any danger, but it certainly helped me get in the right mindset. After a few dozen tries it still didn't feel smooth enough to actually help from a fall. Toph didn't seem surprised.

“You're thinking about it wrong, I can see it in how you react.” She said, walking closer. “You're worried, thinking about falling from even higher, worried that if you don't get this then if you ever need it you won't be able to do it. Fear is the opposite of will. You need to know in your heart the ground won't hurt you because it wouldn't dare. It's going to catch you because it knows better! Now do it again!”

I nodded and focused my mind locked on this idea. I launched myself into the air, reaching my apex before falling back down. I focused on it, focused on the ground reaching up and catching me. It would work because I knew it would, there was no chance of failure because I was in control!

I pulled the earth up, gripping and pushing my energy into the earth as it rose to catch me. A mound of dirt rose up under my feet. I could feel my feet make contact before the earth sank beneath me, slowing me down.

“Good! Now higher!” Toph yelled. She stomped and suddenly a massive pillar of rock launched me up into the air, at least triple what I had been doing before.

I pushed through the fear, getting a mental grip on myself as I rose higher and higher before stopping... and beginning to fall. The ground rushed to meet me and I pulled on the earth again, the mound growing even larger this time, catching me easily as I sank into a crater of my own making.

“That's it! Now even higher!”

Toph launched me a half dozen more times, getting higher and higher each time. By the time I was flying at least sixty feet into the air I was confident in my new ability. I even launched myself a few times, straining to get myself as high as Toph did, but just managing. When I was finally done I was dripping with sweat and bone tired. I leaned back against a boulder to recover, Toph making her way to me.

“That was pretty good, Mopey.” She said with a nod. “You're a pretty decent bender from what I've seen so far. Which is why your homework is going to be a little different. First you need to keep doing your control and endurance training. But I want you to try figuring out the Earthen Wave on your own. Take about two weeks to try and if you can figure it out we can move on to something else.”

“Alright, sure. I'll have it done by the end of the week.” I said, confident in my ability. “Could you do me a favor and do it again? Just a few laps around so I can watch.”

Toph nodded and jumped into the sprint, the earth pushing against her feet. It was a mismatch of movement that didn't visually make the most sense but had the smaller earthbender pushing around the training area pretty quickly. I paid close attention to how her legs moved, how the earth and stone moved around to push her. After a few laps around me she hopped off the wave and skidded to a stop in front of me.

“Alright, that's all you're getting!” She said, her hand reaching forward. “Good luck!”

She reached out and flicked my nose, catching me by surprise. I instinctively moved back, closing my eyes in the process. Instead of taking a step back however I rolled backwards off of my meditation platform, falling to the ground with a thud. I spent a moment just staring at the ceiling of the grotto, before finally letting out a sigh and climbing to my feet. I headed to my room, grumbling the entire time.

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I woke up the next morning to find M'gann knocking on my door. She stopped when I woke, sensing that my mind was cognizant enough to come to pull on some pants and open the door.

“*Good morning Warren, Breakfast... is... almost... ready...*” M'gann said, trailing off when I opened the door. I could feel her shock and appreciation as her eyes drifted lower.

“*Alright M'gann, Let me get dressed real quick and I'll be right there.*”

“*Sure... Alright.*” She responded, shaking her head and blushing before continuing to rapidly speak. “*Umm okay bye see you there!*”

I couldn't help but chuckle as I closed the door, taking a quick rinse in the shower and pulling on some clean clothes. I made my way to the kitchen to find M'gann pulling a fresh batch of muffins from the oven.

*"Jeez M'gann, you're spoiling us."* I said as I walked in.

*"Oh well... I just wanted to try them out..."* She responded, still blushing slightly. I sent her a wave of reassurance, the Martian responding with embarrassed acceptance.

I started setting the table, with Super- *Kyle*, joining us only a minute or so later. He sat down opposite of me, while M'gann sat directly to my right. We ate and made small talk, talking about M'gann's day with her uncle and Kyle's day with his new guardians.

"I'm glad you found guardians you like Kyle." M'gann said after he was done describing his night. "And I'm sorry it took so long for you to get a proper name."

"It's okay. I understand that with how aliases work it was confusing." He said with a nod. "Sarah and I had to explain to Lily as well. She was so angry that she was threatening to march down to the Hall of Justice and start smacking heads."

"She sounds like a protective person, that's good." I said with a smile.

"Sarah said that nothing sets her off quite like people she cares about being mistreated."

"What do they do for a living?" M'gann asked as I started cleaning up from breakfast.

"Sarah is a forensic investigator for the Central City Police Department and Lily is a detective." He explained. "That's how they met apparently."

We talked for a while longer, passing the time until our other three teammates eventually showed up for sparring. M'gann desperately wanted to meet Kyle's new guardians, and I admitted that I wouldn't mind meeting them as well. The clone promised to bring it up the next time he saw them, which was apparently tomorrow. Eventually the first of our other three teammates showed up, the Zeta-Tube announcing their arrival. Together the three of us stood from the table and headed out into the main room to spar.